

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 OMB-01 TRSE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7701
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AEMBASSY JIDDA 9529

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 2250

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, LE
SUBJ: AFTERMATH OF GOVERNMENT RESIGNATION

1. SUMMARY.

BEIRUT HAS REACTED WITH APPARENT CALM TO HOSS GOVERNMENT'S RESIGNATION, WHICH IS AT LEAST IN PART CONNECTED WITH THE HEAVY FIGHTING BETWEEN SYRIANS AND CHRISTIANS IN AYN AR-RUMMANEH LAST WEEK. MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THE NEW CABINET WILL BE POLITICAL. HOSS, TAKIEDDINE SOLH, SA'EB SALAAM AND SHAFIQ WAZZAN HAVE ALL BEEN MENTIONED AS POSSIBLE PRIME MINISTERS, WHILE IT IS WIDELY BELIEVED THAT FOUAD BOUTROS WILL BE RE-APPOINTED AS FOREIGN MINISTER BUT NOT DEFENSE MINISTER.

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2. BEIRUT REACTS WITH CALM.

A. BEIRUT HAS REACTED WITH APPARENT CALM TO RESIGNATION OF HOSS GOVERNMENT APRIL 19 (SEE BEIRUT 2218.) TRAFFIC IS NORMAL AND SHOPS ARE OPEN THROUGHOUT THE CITY, ALTHOUGH MOST SCHOOLS IN EAST BEIRUT HAVE CLOSED.

B. LEBANESE FRONT LEADERSHIP HAS APPARENTLY TAKEN STEPS TO REDUCE LIKELIHOOD OF VIOLENCE DURING TRANSITION PERIOD. ACCORDING TO WELL-PLACED DATT SOURCES, BACHIR GEMAYEL HAS TOLD HIS TROOPS TO KEEP CALM. (PRIOR TO RESIGNATION, BACHIR ON APRIL 18 HAD MADE INFLAMMATORY SPEECH IN AYN AR-RUMMANEH CALLING ON THE INHABITANTS TO TAKE SELF-DEFENSE MEASURES. TRACTS WERE DISTRIBUTED THERE AND IN FURN ASH SHUBBAK CALLING FOR "CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE" AND FOR RIGHTIST "LEBANESE FRONT" TO ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR LOCAL SECURITY.) NATIONAL LIBERAL PARTY (NLP) HEADQUARTERS, AS OF APRIL 19, BEGAN REFUSING REQUESTS OF NLP MILITIA IN AYN AR-RUMMANEH FOR MORE AMMUNITION. LARGE NUMBERS OF CHRISTIAN MILITIA NEVERTHELESS REMAIN ON THE STREETS IN EAST BEIRUT AREA.

3. HOSS' RESIGNATION LETTER.

A. IN HIS LETTER OF RESIGNATION TO PRESIDENT SARKIS, HOSS REFERRED TO THE SECURITY SITUATION AS FOLLOWS: "WE FEEL THAT OUR GOVERNMENT HAS FAITHFULLY SHOULDERED THE RESPONSIBILITY ENTRUSTED TO IT. . . GIVEN THE POLITICAL AND SECURITY ATMOSPHERE WHICH PREVAILED AND THE DIFFICULTIES IT FACED DURING THIS PERIOD. BUT TODAY WE BELIEVE THAT NATIONAL INTERESTS MADE IT NECESSARY FOR US TO GIVE OTHERS THE OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESPONSIBILITY OF GOVERNMENT."

B. IN WHAT CAN BEST BE DESCRIBED AS PUTTING THE BEST FACE
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ON A BAD SITUATION, HOSS ALSO ALLUDED TO PROGRESS TOWARD NATIONAL RECONCILIATION. "NOTHING THAT RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS, ESPECIALLY THE POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS RESULTED FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY CONSULTATIONS YESTERDAY (APRIL 18), FORSHADOW THE RETURN OF ACCORD AMONG THE VARIOUS LEBANESE GROUPS (SEE BEIRUT 2217). . . WE HAVE THE HONOR TO SUBMIT TO YOUR EXCELLENCY THE RESIGNATION OF OUR GOVERNMENT. . . ."

4. OBSERVERS BLAME AYN AR-RUMMANHE.

A. THE RESIGNATION OF THE CABINET FOLLOWED MOUNTING CHRISTIAN CRITICISM OVER THE USE OF THE ARAB DETERRENT FORCES IN AYN AR-RUMMANEH/SHIAH LAST WEEK. MINISTER OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS ASSAK RIZK TOLD AID REP ON APRIL 20 THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD RESIGNED BECAUSE IT FEARED WIDESPREAD FIGHTING BETWEEN SYRIANS AND CHRISTIANS IN WAKE OF THE AYN AR-RUMMANEH/SHIAH INCIDENTS.

B. PRESIDENT SARKIS IN AN APRIL 19 MESSAGE TO THE NATION DID NOT REFER DIRECTLY TO THE GOVERNMENT'S RESIGNATION, BUT MADE CLEAR BY THE TIMING OF HIS MESSAGE THAT THE RESIGNATION WAS AT LEAST IN PART LINKED TO AYN AR-RUMMANEH. SARKIS SAID:

C. "WHEN THE CLASHES OCCURRED BETWEEN SHIAH AND AYN AR-RUMMANEH, THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR SECURITY MADE SEVERAL ATTEMPTS TO STOP THEM. BUT THE SITUATION DETERIORATED AND THE FEAR EMERGED THAT THE TENSION AND CLASHES MIGHT SPREAD TO OTHER AREAS, WHICH WOULD LEAD TO A SERIOUS DETERIORATION IN THE SECURITY SITUATION AND RECREATE THE CONDITIONS WHICH EXISTED IN 1975 AND 1976.

D. "IT WAS NEITHER POSSIBLE NOR RATIONAL FOR THE (ARAB) DETERRENT FORCES TO IGNORE WHAT WAS HAPPENING. INTERVENTION WAS NECESSARY. A QUICK POLITICAL DECISION WAS MADE TO STOP THE FIGHTING, AND THE TASK OF IMPLEMENTING THE DECISION WAS ENTRUSTED TO THE DETERRENT FORCES. IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT HAD WE HAD EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVE AGENCIES, WE
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WOULD NOT HAVE HESITATED TO USE THEM".

5. RETURN TO POLITICAL CABINET.

MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT THE RESIGNATION OF THE PRESENT EIGHT-MAN CABINET, WHICH WAS FORMED ON 9 DECEMBER 1976, THREE WEEKS AFTER THE END OF THE COUNTRY'S 19-MONTH CIVIL WAR, PRESAGES A RETURN TO A "POLITICAL" CABINET. HEALTH MINISTER IBRAHIM CHEAITO TOLD REPORTERS THE CABINET HAD STEPPED DOWN "TO GIVE POLITICIANS A CHANCE TO SHOULDER THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES."

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 2250

B. NLP LEADER CAMILLE CHAMOUN, WHOSE ATTITUDE IS CRITICAL FOR SUCCESS OF ANY NEW GOVERNMENT, SAID HE WOULD WITHHOLD COMMENT ON THE KIND OF GOVERNMENT LEBANON NEEDED NOW UNTIL HE HAD A CHANCE TO SPEAK WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS, BUT CHAMOUN, HOWEVER, IMPLIED GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE POLITICAL. "I DID NOT THINK THE GOVERNMENT WOULD RESIGN SO QUICKLY. I BELIEVED THAT A NEW MINISTERIAL TEAM SHOULD BE READY BEFORE THE DEPARTURE OF THE CABINET. . . . IN ANY EVENT WE CANNOT TODAY GIVE OURSELVES OVER TO NEW EXPERIMENTS. THE DECISION WHICH WILL BE TAKEN WILL HAVE TO HAVE A SERIOUS DEFINITIVE CHARACTER, ABLE TO SOLVE ALL PROBLEMS THAT THE COUNTRY COULD FACE."

5. SPECULATION ON CABINET COMPOSITION.

A. SPECULATION ABOUNDS AS TO THE COMPOSITION OF
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THE NEW CABINET, BUT LITTLE OF IT IS BASED ON SOLID INFORMATION. ENGLISH LANGUAGE DAILY IKE QUOTED INFORMED SOURCES AS SAYING THAT PRESIDENT SARKIS HAS A "STRONG INCLINATION" TO RE-APPOINT PRIME MINISODR HOSS BUT THAT THERE WAS A "30 PERCENT CHANCE" THAT FORMER PRIME MINISTER TAKIEDDINE SOLH WOULD BE CHOSEN TO HEAD THE NEW GOVERNMENT.

B. AFTER MEETING WITH SARKIS EVENING OF APRIL 19, NLP MILITARY LEADER DANY CHAMOUN TOLD POLOFF THAT SARKIS HAD NOT OFFERED HIM A JOB. (COMMENT: WE BELIEVE THAT DANY STILL WANTS A POSITION IN THE NEW CABINET AND MAY BE OFFERED ONE. CAMILLE CHAMOUN'S ATTITUDE WILL DETERMINE DANY'S DECISION. END COMMENT.) DANY SAID HE HAD ALSO SEEN GABY LAHOUD (FORMER CHEHABIST G-2) AT THE PALACE AND EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT LATTER, WHOM HE DISLIKES, MIGHT BE NEXT MINISTER OF DEFENSE. DANY SAID LAHOUD WAS TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE TO CAMILLE CHAMOUN. DANY PERSONALLY FAVORED SA'EB SALAAM AS NEW PRIME MINISTER. (NLP INTELLIGENCE CHIEF TOLD DATT, HOWEVER, THAT SHAFIQ WAZZAN WAS FRONT-RUNNER FOR POSITION.)

C. TANZIM LEADER GEORGE ADWAN TOLD POLOFF THAT HE HAD HEARD THAT THE CABINET WOULD CONSIST OF "EIGHT OLDER POLITICIANS AND 16 YOUNGER ONES," INCLUDING AMIN GEMAYEL, DANY CHAMOUN, WALID JUMBLATT AND ZIAD AL HAFIZ FROM AL MURABITUN. HOSS WOULD BE THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER.

D. KARIM PAKRADOUNI AGREED THAT THE CABINET WOULD INCLUDE BOTH OLDER AND YOUNGER POLITICIANS. HE SAID THE DEFENSE PORTFOLIO WAS THE GREATEST UNRESOLVED
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PROBLEM. PAKRADOUNI BELIEVED THE CABINET'S DECISION TO RESIGN HAD BEEN TAKEN LAST SATURDAY, BUT ITS ANNOUNCEMENT HAD BEEN POSTPONED UNTIL APRIL 19.

E. DANY, ADWAN AND PAKRADOUNI ALL THOUGHT BOUTROS WOULD BE RE-APPOINTED FOREIGN MINISTER BUT NOT DEFENSE MINISTER. (BOUTROS HAS ACTED AS SARKIS' KEY POLITICAL ADVISOR ON BOTH DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS.)

7. COMMENT: TIMING OF CABINET'S RESIGNATION APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN DETERMINED BY AYN AR-RUMMANEH INCIDENT AND BY CONCILIATORY MEETING OF 25 KEY DEPUTIES OF ALL CONFESSIONAL GROUPS ON APRIL 18, WHICH OFFERS SOME HOPE THAT FEUDING LEBANESE MAY BE WILLING TO COMPROMISE AND COOPERATE. WE BELIEVE LEBANESE FRONT IS LIKELY TO ACT WITH RESTRAINT, AT LEAST WHILE INITIAL MANEUVERINGS ARE GOING ON FOR CABINET POSTS. FORMATION OF POLITICAL CABINET COULD TRANSFER FACTIONAL ANIMOSITIES TO GOL'S FORMAL ADMINISTRATION, THUS AGAIN PARALYZING GOVERNMENT. IF LEBANESE FRONT AND PARTICULARLY CAMILLE CHAMOUN DECIDE TO COOPERATE WITH NEW GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, IT MAY BE ABLE TO EASE TENSIONS AT LEAST FOR TIME BEING. UNDER MOST OPTIMISTIC OF SCENARIOS, FORMATION OF NEW CABINET WILL NOT ITSELF PRODUCE SOLUTION TO FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS FACING LEBANON.
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